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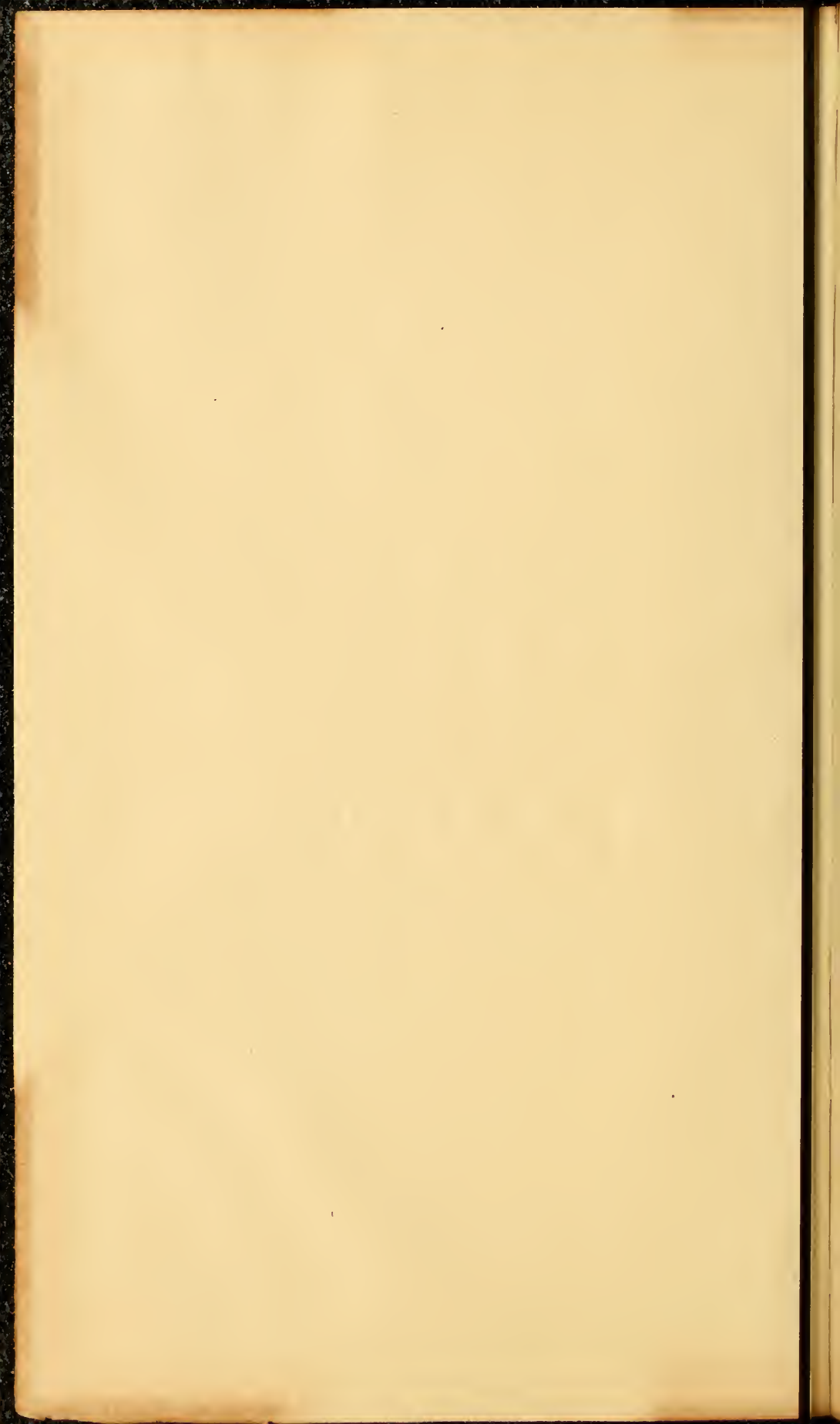
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THE

HOURS OF CHILDHOOD:

A POEM.

'T was odor fled as soon as shed,  
'T was morning's winged dream—  
'T was a light that ne'er can shine again  
On life's dull stream!

T. MOORE.

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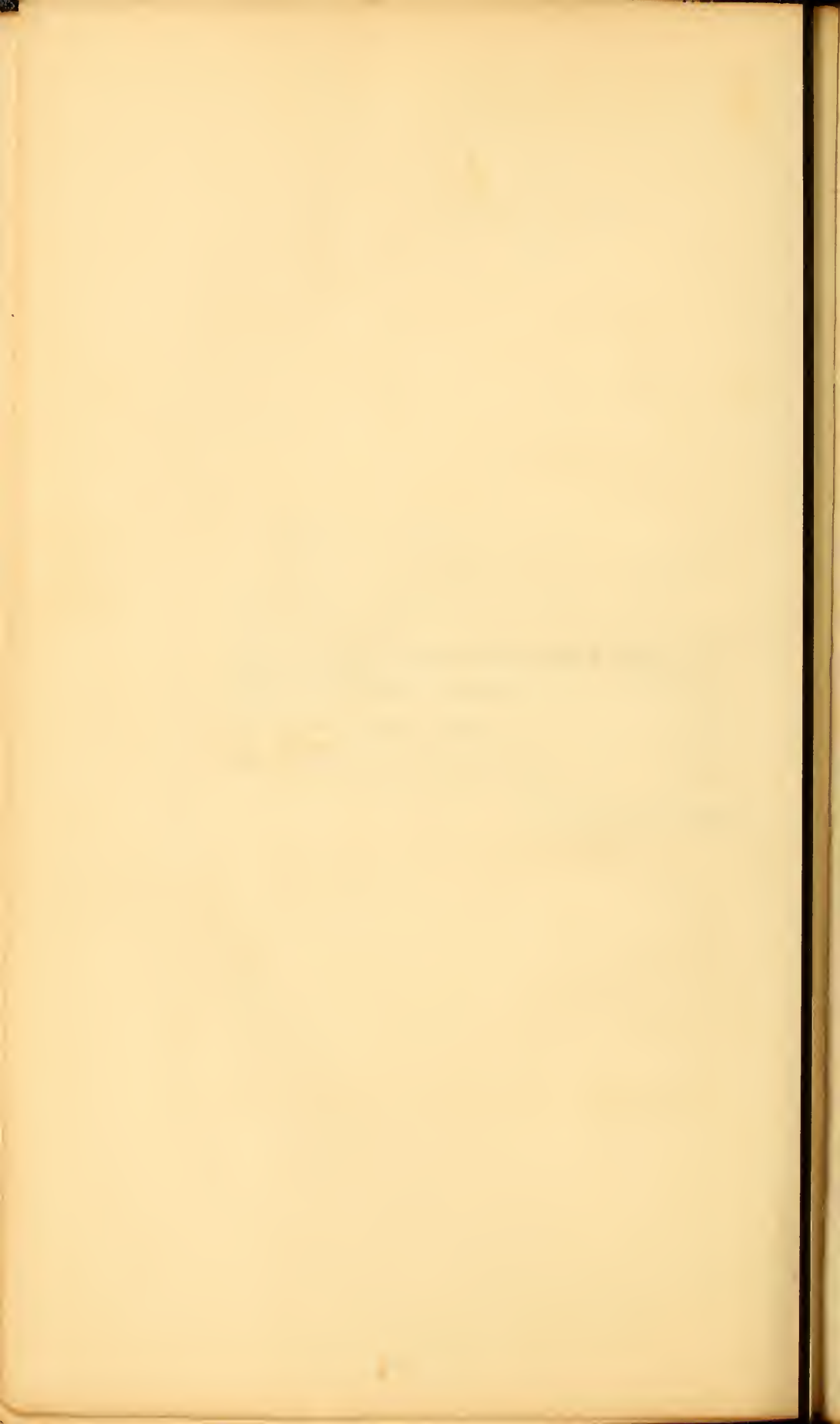
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TO

PROF. WILLIAM L. ROY,

As a slight memorial of esteem for the friendship of one, whose talents and reputation justly entitle him to the generous respect of all—and who has more than ordinary claims to the best wishes of the author—this little Poem is respectfully dedicated.



## THE HOURS OF CHILDHOOD.

---

FAREWELL, thou lovely day of youth, farewell !

For thee, the Muse a garland now doth weave  
Of flowerets, culled from mountain, field and dell,

Which fond Remembrance at thy tomb shall leave.

But will thy rosy morn ne'er dawn again

Upon the cheerless face of life's dull plain ?

Cannot its fragrance yet again be shed

On manhood's brow, or on the hoary head ?

No ! ne'er again its happy dew shall fall

On hours once wrapped in time's obscuring pall !

No magic art can their lost charms restore,

For when they fade, they fade to bloom no more !

O Childhood ! gone, alas, is thy bright day,

When on the sunny lawns I used to play ;

When flowery Time, with Joy, flew smiling by,

Linked hand in hand, beneath a cloudless sky ;

Yet Fancy's wand bids all thy charms arise,

In pristine glow, before my longing eyes.

Kind Memory oft extends her willing hand,

And leads me back to view again that land,

Where roses bloom in one perpetual spring,

And buds of joy are ever blossoming ;—



Points out those spots o'er which I loved to stray,  
Or calls to mind those hours, long passed away,  
When airy childhood scampered thro' the hall,  
And, from the ceiling, caught the bounding ball ;  
Or when, in early spring, I ranged the brook,  
And from its side the yellow cowslip took ;  
Or sat and watched the little busy mill,  
With sweet content, beside the rippling rill ;—  
These oft in lucid beauty round me rise,  
While Retrospection other charms supplies.

How oft I've sat, at eve, in vernal spring,  
And listened long to every echoing  
That Nature threw upon the dewy air,  
Whose harmony in sweetness lingered there ;  
Or gazed awhile upon the starry skies,  
And sought for that celestial paradise,  
Where young Imagination oft had strayed,  
Mid balmy groves, and flowers that never fade.  
For buoyant youth fair Fancy builds her bower,  
Untouched by frosty Reason's blighting power,  
Ere earth-born Care usurps the mental throne,  
And claims the rich inheritance its own.

NEW-ENGLAND, hail !—my own dear native land !  
Thy fond endearments still before me stand ;  
Thy lovely vales, and fair blue hills appear,  
When recollection brings the distant near.  
Forgetfulness' dark veil shall ne'er be spread  
Upon the home that once my childhood fed :

No—gathering years may thickly intervene,  
And time's deep shadows darkly fall between,  
But Memory's eagle eye can pierce the past,  
And one bright ray shall linger there at last.

'Neath that paternal roof, where first I drew  
Life's balmy breath, how light the moments flew ;  
How sweetly slipped the golden hours away,  
While Innocence with Mirth did folly play !  
Those versicolored halls still seem to ring  
With youth's brisk laugh and merry gamboling ;—  
Within that room where hoary Age reposed,  
O there was halcyon peace likewise enclosed !  
There great-grandmother sat, and puffed away  
The stifling fumes of care, from day to day ;  
There stood the faithful clock, which truly told  
That age, itself, was hourly growing old.  
Its pensive, solemn beats she heeded not,  
But yet life's slippery hold was ne'er forgot ;  
Though deaf the ear, and dim the mortal sight,  
On Canaan's Land she viewed a heavenly light :  
'Twas like the star that shone o'er Bethlehem,—  
Her guide unto the New Jerusalem.  
Through five score years\* the wheels of life had run,  
Unclogged and true, since they their course begun ;  
But time, at length, their onward speed decreased,—  
The goal, at last, was reached—their motion ceased !

\* The author's great-grandmother attained the uncommon age of 103 years.

The embers of her pipe then ceased to burn,  
As the last wreath of smoke did upward turn ;  
So, gently sunk her time-worn frame to dust,  
While fled the soul to regions of the just.

Now she has gone, and years have borne me hence,  
No more, for me, can she the tale commence  
Of early times—of hardships then endured,—  
Of savage wolves—and blessings, how secured ;  
How health and plenty sprung from prudent means,—  
How Mirth cut capers o'er a pot of beans,  
While Indian puddings smoked with sober grace,  
And wholesome cider gave a ruddy face ;  
How doctors let the honest people live,  
No noxious drug were they then known to give ;  
How hale New-England's lovely daughters were,  
Ere Fashion's bane had touched the artless fair.  
These times are past, primeval bliss has fled,  
The Paradise is lost, and Virtue dead !  
By golden fruits frail man is led astray,  
To-morrow sighs for what he held to-day ;  
While at the shrine of Folly still he kneels,  
Nor dares to own the constant curse he feels.

In summer's prime, and at the close of day,  
I've heard the plaintive robin's evening lay ;  
The tree-frog's chirp, and night-jar's whistling cry  
Seemed echoing from the mild, ethereal sky,  
While in the golden south was hushed to sleep  
The breeze that thro' the day did gently creep ;

And while within the deeply crimsoned west,  
In clouds of amber sunk the sun to rest,  
The owl's sad hoot upon the craggy hill,  
But made his lonely home more lonely still.  
And at that hour, when Somnus rules the night,—  
And the full moon gives down its mildest light,—  
When jack-o'-lanterns dance the vale along,  
Then comes the Whippoorwill's portentous song.\*  
Ye timid fair ! fear not the little bird,  
But at your window let its notes be heard ;  
For, with a sweet and soporific strain,  
He sings for you till morning dawns again.

The autumn, too, had sober charms for me,  
When crimson leaves bedecked the maple tree,—  
The yellow ash, the oak, and hazel brown,—  
The withered leaf, that lightly flittered down,  
And those that rustled 'neath my careful tread,  
Bespoke of things once fair, and those now dead !  
When fair October shed auriferous light  
On every mountain, field, and meadow bright,—  
When orchards bowed beneath their bounteous store,  
And mellow skies proclaimed the summer o'er,  
Then happy hours did lightly o'er me roll,  
For autumn serves to tranquilize the soul.  
O, there's a charm in mild autumnal days,  
Though nature droops, and silently decays ;

\*The nocturnal visits of this bird to the dwellings of the superstitious are thought, by them, to portend evil.

Yet, Christian-like, she calmly yields her bloom,  
And smiles before the universal tomb !

On yonder green behold the youthful group,  
Propelling each the swift-revolving hoop,  
Symbolical of every circling hour,  
That e'er imparts to youth some pleasing power.  
Do anxious thoughts their constant peace molest,  
Or rankling cares their joyous sports infest ?  
No—unalloyed their blithesome moments fly,  
Imparting joys, that seem ne'er born to die.  
Beneath the shade observe those lasses fair,  
Intwining rosy wreaths to deck their hair ;—  
They little heed how soon life's morn must fade,  
Like gathered flowers, that there are withering laid ;—  
Ah ! soon its charms must fleetingly decay,  
On time's swift car for ever borne away.  
Oh cruel Time ! why rudely snatchest thou  
The verdant leaves that hang o'er childhood's brow ?  
Why clip the thread of all its tender joys,  
And, unrelenting, grasp its precious toys ?  
Despoiler thou of childish innocence !  
What kind reward, or gracious recompense  
Dost thou bestow on infant Virtue's deeds ?  
Alas, thou scatterest far and wide the seeds  
Of climbing Vice, beneath whose darkening shade,  
Fair Virtue's flowers soon languish, droop and fade !

Scene of my youth ! how changed thy beauteous form,  
O'er which has swept so many a ruthless storm !



Here still the cottage stands, whose empty walls  
The bat forsakes as dewy evening falls,  
Where Silence mute, her lonely night-watch keeps,  
As thro' the broken panes the star-light peeps ;  
Here unforbidden weeds have grown before  
The shattered window, and the hingeless-door ;  
The moss-grown roof is now with ivy spread,—  
But every soul has gone—they long have fled.  
Some wander now in a far distant clime,  
And some are sunk beneath the waves of time ;  
Like new-fledged birds that leave the parent nest,  
Some flying north and south, some east and west,—  
So have the children left their youthful home,  
Through all the changeful scenes of life to roam ;  
While the rank grass, with wild profusion waves,  
In solemn stillness o'er their parents' graves.

Within this cot's dilapidated shell,  
Domestic happiness was wont to dwell ;  
No jarring strife its social inmates knew,  
For Peace her golden halo round them threw ;  
Their lot content, they sipped the balmy wealth,  
That flowed from out the precious urn of health.  
Here Industry once plied the knitting steel,  
And caused to hum the busy spinning-wheel ;  
Swift to and fro th' untiring shuttle flew,  
While Bob, the self-taught cobbler, soled his shoe :  
Thus active hands, that home-spun comfort gained,  
Which frugal care so lastingly retained.  
When evening hushed the day's unceasing din,

And twilight called the weary laborer in,  
How cheerfully around the faggot fire  
The children sat, to hear their tender sire  
Relate the sports, that once his boyhood knew,  
And tell of feats, that courage led him through ;  
Or, with a prattling child on either knee,  
And, pleased with all their young garrulity,  
He stoops to act his youthful frolics o'er,  
And mimics joys that now are his no more.  
The grandsire too, with corrugated brow,  
Feels his worn frame invigorated now ;  
And, while the boy bestrides the hickory broom,  
Careering round the neatly garnished room,  
Picks up his cane, and joins the merry race,  
Shaking his white locks o'er his furrowed face.  
'Tis this that quells the storms that fiercely rage  
Around the tottering tenement of age ;  
Trims the dull lamp of waning life anew,  
And adds to joys, now feeble, faint and few.

When the bright sun had thro' the Scorpion gone,  
And frosty nights at length came stealing on,  
Young William oft would take his pumpkin seat,  
And thro' the ashes draw his crusted feet ;  
While the mysterious but cheering blaze  
Held long his sober, meditating gaze :  
Heard there the cricket's lone, nocturnal cry,  
And thought of every witch that sweeps the sky ;  
Or sat and heard some boding story told,  
Of fiery comets, northern-lights and gold

That dragons watch, or give for souls of men,  
Who little know how much they're cheated then ;  
For misers grasp, unheeding future loss,  
Nor think the glittering prize will prove but dross ;  
But ah ! while waves of wealth around them roll,  
The demon comes to claim the mortgaged soul.  
With goblins, ghosts, and witches in his head,  
And hair on end, he steers his course to bed ;  
But when Aurora oped the morning's door,  
They fled—nor dared, till eve, to enter more.

On thymy banks the sun-burnt children play,  
Regardless each of life's dark future day ;  
Around them Hope's delusive phantom flies,  
Spreading new charms before their ravished eyes.  
'Tis balmy morn—the dewy air is still,  
The wild bird sings upon the sloping hill ;  
The thrush reiterates his varied strain,  
And music fills the leafy woods again ;  
Expanding flowers sweet fragrance round them fling,  
Rejoicing in the lap of genial Spring ;  
The rising sun lets down its morning beam  
In silvery splendor on the placid stream,  
Down in whose wave the trees their shadows throw,  
And seem to make a lovely world below.

O blessed morn ! how like thyself, I find,  
Are those bright mornings of the youthful mind !  
The smiling looks, those lads and lasses wear,  
Bespeak the joys their guileless bosoms bear.

How merrily they trip it o'er the green,  
Where hare-bells hang, and violet beds are seen,—  
Where rose-buds ope to share the morning's bliss,  
While wasting dew-drops take their parting kiss.

Their careless sport the wary mother sees,  
But now her saddened heart they fail to please ;  
For, while her sickly babe she fondly feeds,  
Its destiny her fearful fancy reads,  
But hopes that time may yet the victim save,  
The while she rocks its cradle on the grave ;  
But still those youths, regardless of its fate,  
Are prancing in their wonted merry state,  
On whom tempestuous Sorrow ne'er has rose,  
To mar their infant intellect's repose.  
Speed on, ye playful lads,—I love to see  
You sport away your time so joyfully ;  
But mark,—those verdant leaves that deck the trees  
Must fade and fall before the autumn breeze ;  
So, shall your joys soon wither and decay,  
Beneath the frosts of life's autumnal day !

Far from the town, whose tumults ne'er him meet,  
A Hermit long has held his lone retreat.  
Tired of the world, amid the mountains rude,  
He lives a life of peaceful solitude :  
Here, undisturbed, alone he loves to roam,  
Where not a soul molests his sylvan home.  
One morn I wandered to his silent cell,  
To seek the cause that led him there to dwell ;—

Methought some wreck of reason there to find,  
Th' effect of injured love for womankind.  
It proved but true—for, with a pensive sigh,  
And tear-drops starting in his downcast eye,  
He, sobbing, told his piteous tale of love,  
Which to his future joys did fatal prove :—

“There was a time,” said he, “when I could share  
Life’s social joys, and laugh at haggard Care,—  
Mix in the dance, and join the festive throng,  
And happy were the hours that sped along ;  
But oh, how vanishing, to me were they,  
The sad ephemera of a single day !  
The rainbow-tints, that floating bubbles bear,  
As soon as touched dissolve in viewless air ;  
Thus, pleasure’s tantalizing charms depart,  
When fondly pressed upon the doting heart.  
I sigh for thieving Time to yield again  
The stolen hours of youth—but sigh in vain.  
O, these were hours that true enjoyment graced,  
Whose beauties now so sadly are defaced.  
'Twas cruel Love that first my bosom tore,  
Which time may heal, but ne’er again restore  
That heartfelt happiness enjoyed before.  
A single flood of tears can sweep away  
The child’s vexatious ills, and soon repay  
By sweet forgetfulness all injury borne,  
And bid the wounded breast no longer mourn ;  
But where on earth, I beg you tell me where,  
Is found a balm to mitigate despair !



The thorn remains, despite of human art,  
With which desponding Love torments the heart ;  
'Tis left alone, to probe and fester through,  
Snapping, the while, each tender cord in two.  
To fair Adelia's charms my love was given,  
Pure as the radiant light that shines from heaven ;  
In her I saw, and long I hoped to see,  
Reciprocated love and constancy.  
By mutual ties in fond affection bound,  
No happier moments ere were sought or found  
Than when of her I thought, or even dreamed ;  
And, while the blissful hours thus ran, I seemed  
For her to live, and move, and have my being,  
Our loves in such sweet unison agreeing.  
Methought no earthly chance their tie could sever,  
And that affection's bond might last for ever ;  
But oh ! she proved too false—her charms she sold,  
Enraptured by the glare of glittering gold,  
Whose curse has caused man's tears and blood to flow,  
Like mountain torrents from dissolving snow !  
In vain I plead—and fiercer grew the flame,  
Till sickening Reason died, and Madness came.  
Oh, say, what power can hold the bursting heart,  
When hopes, like mine, so suddenly depart !  
Th'attenuated thread the spider spins  
Dances, but holds, when the rough gale begins ;  
But how unlike to this, love's tender tie,—  
It breaks in every breeze of jealousy.  
For blighted hopes, and disappointed love,  
I here amid the dreary mountains rove :

Here, long sequestered in the silent wood,  
From day to day I pick precarious food.  
It suits me now, while in my cell alone,  
To sit and listen to the night-wind's moan ;  
And when the stormy clouds begin to scowl,  
I love to hear the tempest-spirit's howl ;  
It seems to lend a sympathetic sigh,  
As Memory rolls her waves of sorrow by.  
They say my brain is somewhat shattered yet,—  
'Tis true—but when a few more links are let  
From heavy Time's rust-gathering chain of years,—  
When pitying Death a sheltering tomb uprears,  
Then from the ills of vexing life I'll fly,  
To meet my hopes, long centered in the sky."

O wretched man ! his happiest hours are o'er,  
His earlier days can visit him no more !  
These were the best his pilgrimage e'er knew ;  
And these soon vanished like the morning dew.  
Ere the wild thoughts of love inflamed his breast,  
No dreams of wo disturbed his tranquil rest ;  
But now, a sad recluse borne down with grief,  
He only looks to Heaven for kind relief.

When Sol to Capricorn had wheeled his course,  
And blustering Boreas came with frigid force—  
When trees were bare, and lonely stood the pine,  
And snow-clad hills did at a distance shine—  
When squirrels fed upon their winter's store,  
And snow-birds pecked around the farmer's door,

Then pleasure still beguiled the wintry hours,  
And joy lent all its soul-enlivening powers.  
What though the driving snow-storm howled at night,  
And not a twinkling star gave down its light ;  
What though the freezing blasts did hoarsely roar,  
And whistle through the outward kitchen door—  
Still Pleasure, Comfort, Mirth remained within,  
Unmindful of the wild, incessant din.

The blind-man's-buff now agitates again  
The slumber of the aged traveller's brain,  
To whom a transient shelter here is given,  
By cold, penurious Fortune hither driven.  
And while the jovial merriment we share,  
Unburthened and untouched by vexing care,  
He often casts around his dimmed eyes,  
And wonders where such trival pleasure lies !  
Poor man ! he now forgets that he was once  
The trifling child whom he proclaims a dunce ;  
He now forgets that once he loved to toy  
With things that vex the man, but please the boy.  
But go, poor wanderer, when the morn appears,  
And grope your way along the vale of years ;  
And there, amid the thorns and briars, you'll find  
The rose, that there has long been left behind ;  
But all its charms have fleetingly decayed,  
Its petals now are all neglected laid.  
Wet it with tears, but these will ne'er restore  
That loveliness which tints it now no more.

The school-room scenes I never can forget,  
Where friends and floggings, too, I oft have met.  
I recollect one pedagogue we had,  
At whom the truants looked most wondrous sad ;  
For, with a rod, he bade them all defiance,  
And drove the youngsters up the hill of science.  
He taught the little lads their A, B, C,  
But, O, they scarce came down to X, Y, Z !  
Addition's tribe I quickly blundered through,  
Subtraction then came creeping into view ;  
To Multiply was next my greatest pride,  
And then, to crown at once the whole—Divide.  
This climax reached, I scornfully looked down  
On every stupid dolt, or cyphering clown,  
Who only knew that two and two were four,  
And this obtained by counting fingers o'er.  
How flashed his eye when he essayed to quell  
The busy hum, to hear the circle spell !  
And when at eve he kneeled in humble prayer,  
What pantomimic sports were acted there !  
Here Tom and Bill display their monkey tricks,  
While honest Jack his nearest neighbor pricks ;  
In sweet profusion stolen kisses fly,  
But vigilant withal is every eye.  
Thus, while their hearts should all be raised to heaven,  
The hand of each is now to mischief given.  
“ Delightful task ! to rear the tender thought,”  
And keep the noisy blockheads where they ought !  
“ To teach the young idea how to shoot,”  
The lord of every idle *fool and brute* !

As o'er this once-loved scene I lately ranged,  
I found its former beauties sadly changed ;  
The shady grove at length is cut away,  
The bending elms are verging to decay ;  
No more is seen the cooling summer-bower,  
In which I've spent so many a lovely hour.  
The roses, butter-cups, and daisies now,  
Are falling fast before the farmer's plough ;  
The robin sings, but with a tiresome strain—  
And O, he ne'er will sing so sweet again,  
As once he sung within the grove for me,  
Tuning his notes with pleasing melody !

Companions of my youth ! where are you all !  
O that your distant ears could hear the call,  
And quickly fly to meet me here again,  
Together bound by Friendship's silken chain,  
As once we were, when here we gaily met,  
To form the wreath, whose flowers are blooming yet.  
But hark ! a low, responding voice I hear,  
Whispering that they shall never more appear  
In boyhood's garb, and in their wonted glee,  
To interchange their youthful smiles with me.  
It says that Time will ne'er his course renew,  
To bring departed scenes again to view ;  
Nor retrograde—though wished—but onward press,  
Exploring the dark Future's wilderness.  
Alas ! I call in vain—so let me here,  
On Memory's altar, immolate a tear,



And wind along my meditating way,  
To other scenes a passing tribute pay.

Hard by the cobbler had his little stall,  
Who, though his daily earnings were but small,  
Had constant ease and happiness in store,  
And neither sighed, nor even wished for more.  
Here long he lived, and long the village shod,  
At peace with all—nor varying with his God.  
Though sixty years had turned him somewhat gray,  
He hammered, sung, and whistled time away,  
As if youth's coronal still decked his brow,  
Which Time's keen scythe perchance had failed to mow.  
To keep his heart in cheer, and form the shoe,  
And read and write, were mostly all he knew ;  
Yet these sufficed to guard his earthly weal,  
To watch his peace—and gain his home a meal.

Thus passed he on, unknown to worldly strife—  
A happier soul ne'er trod the path of life ;  
And even when palsied age his nerves unstrung,  
His cheerful heart seemed vigorous, fresh and young.  
And when, at last, this good old cobbler died,  
Around his bier the village children cried ;—  
They wept awhile the hearse moved slowly on,  
To think their kind companion now had gone.  
Aye, Death at length—but with a gentle stroke,  
Life's golden pitcher at the fountain broke.  
How sad the thought that time should e'er destroy  
A heart so constantly o'erflown with joy !

When wan Disease her arms around him flung,  
And o'er his couch the solemn death-song sung,  
She paused awhile, as if aside to weep—  
Then lulled him soon to an eternal sleep!

O vain ambition ! had he known thy power,  
Could have passed so many a peaceful hour ?  
Lo him who strives to gain the world's applause,  
Toiling to please, not knowing where to pause.  
See, how he climbs the rugged cliffs of Fame,  
To carve him there an everlasting name ;  
And while he views the moving scene below,  
His fellow kind to lessened pigmies grow.  
He rests not here—but toils to gain the height,  
Where radiant Fancy throws immortal light,  
And where he hopes to find a calm repose ;  
But shivering there, perchance, mid chilling snows,  
He upward hies, by blasts and tempests driven,  
The storms increasing as he nears his heaven.  
Thus, for awhile, his upward course he wends,  
And then, with keen reluctance quick descends  
Into the lowly vale, to bend and die,  
Where the poor beggar's mouldering ashes lie!

Hail potent Memory ! let me share thy power  
Even to the verge of life's departing hour ;  
Bring often all my former joys to mind,  
But leave, O leave intruding ills behind !  
Permit me now with thee again to rove,  
Through every meadow, woodland, field and grove ;

Or speed thee there, and, like the summer bee,  
Extract from flowers nectarean sweets for me.  
Show me again the little favorite pool,—  
The careful hand that led me safe to school  
May now my fancy have the power to press,  
And share, as once, a mother's fond caress.  
Guide me again along my father's dales,  
Where lilies bend—and quietness prevails ;  
Bedeck again those shattered, leafless bowers  
With twigs of evergreen, and new-culled flowers ;  
Light up anew the warm domestic fire,  
And strike for me once more the pleasing lyre,  
That there so oft hath charmed my listening ear,  
But whose enchanting strain no more I hear.  
Its notes have fled for aye, like words once spoken—  
'T is laid aside—its tuneful strings are broken !

O constant Change ! the lot of all things here—  
How dost thou mark the ever-varying year !  
See, how the dying leaves in autumn fall,  
And mark, how smiling Spring renews them all ;  
Observe how youth to ripened manhood springs,  
And age, how quickly marked with furrowings  
Of harrowing years, that desolate the scene,  
Where once the leaves of youth were young and green !  
Perhaps, O man, bewrinkled o'er with care,  
Thou fain wouldst tax old Time for wear and tear ;  
But what avails, since thou'rt aware thou must  
Forgive the debt, and mingle with the dust !

Eff

A saddening thought doth through my bosom steal,  
As time's obliterating change I feel ;  
Reluctantly I yield those peerless days,  
On which Remembrance fondly loves to gaze.  
Alas, they 're gone ! they did but briefly last—  
They 're sunk within the dark, devouring Past ;  
But MEMORY, still, shall sweetly linger o'er  
The sepulchre of hours enjoyed no more !

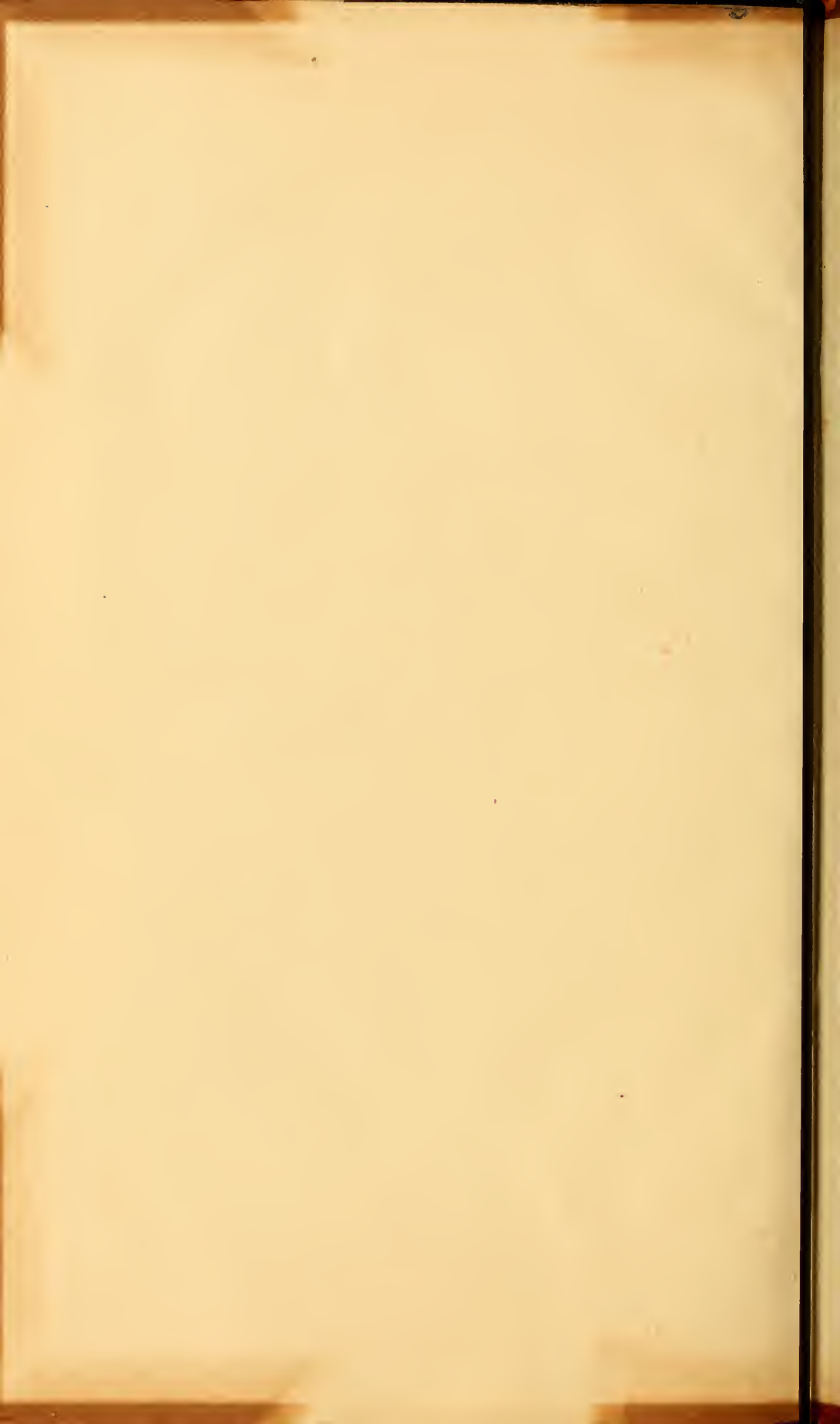
THE END.













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